

July 25, 2018

Exhibit 8

**Doug Abelin**

**5330 Lake Helena Drive**

**Helena, Mt. 59602**

**406-461-4818**

**Dabelin@live.com**

---

To: Environmental Quality Council

FROM: Doug Abelin, President, Capital Trail Vehicle Association, Board Member, Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Association, Past Member of both Montana's Off-Highway Vehicles Advisory Committee, and the Federal Highways RTP Grants Advisory Committee. 6 Years, Butte Division BLM RAC Committee, Many Years Lobbyist for Off High-Way Motorized Recreation, and other entities.

SUBJECT: Increase in State Gas Tax to Montana's Off-Highway Vehicle Program.

I appreciate that the Environmental Quality Council is considering a bill to increase from 1/8 of 1% to 23/50 of 1% of the money received in payment of the (state) gasoline tax to be deposited to an off-highway vehicle account in the state special revenue fund. This increased amount is supported in a study by the University of Montana's Bureau of Business and Economic Research.

It is important to point out that gas tax returned to the off-highway vehicle (OHV) program is for gas used in off-highway vehicles off roads! The gas tax percentage authorized to the OHV account has not increased since 1991, only the increased amount of gas tax charged over the years, has slightly increased the total dollars received. The number of registered OHVs has increased tremendously since I carried the "ORIGINAL BILL" that created the program in 1991. Senator Gage and I negotiated the 1/8 of 1% with Montana Highways Director as we wrote the Bill on behalf of MTVRA, CTVA, and all Off-Highway recreationists in Montana. Our reasoning was we had no program to base a value of needs, and that we would ask for adjustment to the fees as the need was proven. Now is the time to do that adjustment, agreed upon so many years ago, as the long "sought after study", now completed, shows.

A need exists for this increase in state gas tax funds to the OHV program. In FY 2018, applications for OHV grant funds totaled \$185,000 while only \$110,000 was available. Several project applications were not funded due to the small amount available. Examples would include expanding the regional OHV trail maintenance program for additional funds to address the many

backlog of projects per year. Currently one single grant to the Montana Trail Vehicle Riders Association allows them to contract with a trail builder-maintainer who owns a Sweco Traildozer to maintain and rehabilitate OHV trails on four national forests., yet the need for this type of work is statewide, and constantly growing. 99% of OHV trails exist on U.S. Forest Service and BLM lands and Grants on or to federal agencies for OHV projects require collaboration with a OHV club!

There is a need for the "On the Right Trail Ethics Education Program" to expand its efforts each year, to grow with expanding OHV Youth usage. Montana has the best ethics education program in the United States and several other states are now copying our example. Montana's program needs additional funds due to inadequate growth built into the funding, because of the tremendous growth in numbers, and the wants of other schools asking for the program, therefore several important tools of the program have been dropped. Local OHV clubs have worked with land management agencies to develop quality OHV routes, and the need for updated maps, but unfortunately there has not been adequate funds to provide them either in a timely manner, and numbers, to Montana's OHV public statewide. Additional grant funds of \$50,000 per year would allow OHV clubs to work with agencies, counties, cities, and our commerce programs to promote and expand this effort statewide!

Montana's OHV grant program includes water ways and water craft, so funds for invasive species abatement is a need, and draws from our funds, and are supported by some local clubs and Fish, Wildlife & Parks.

The state OHV Program is administered by Fish, Wildlife & Parks which relies on a citizens OHV Advisory Committee to recommend grants for OHV projects. That citizen's advisory committee also makes recommendation for the future of the grant program and OHV issues statewide.

I have served on the OHV Advisory Committee, for many years, prior to term limits, nine, I think, and I hope you increase the amount of the state gas tax going to Montana's off-highway vehicle program and sponsor the proposed bill. It is long over due, and we have justified the need. Thanks for your Consideration.